



Directorate of
Intelligence

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Afghanistan Situation Report



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18 January 1983

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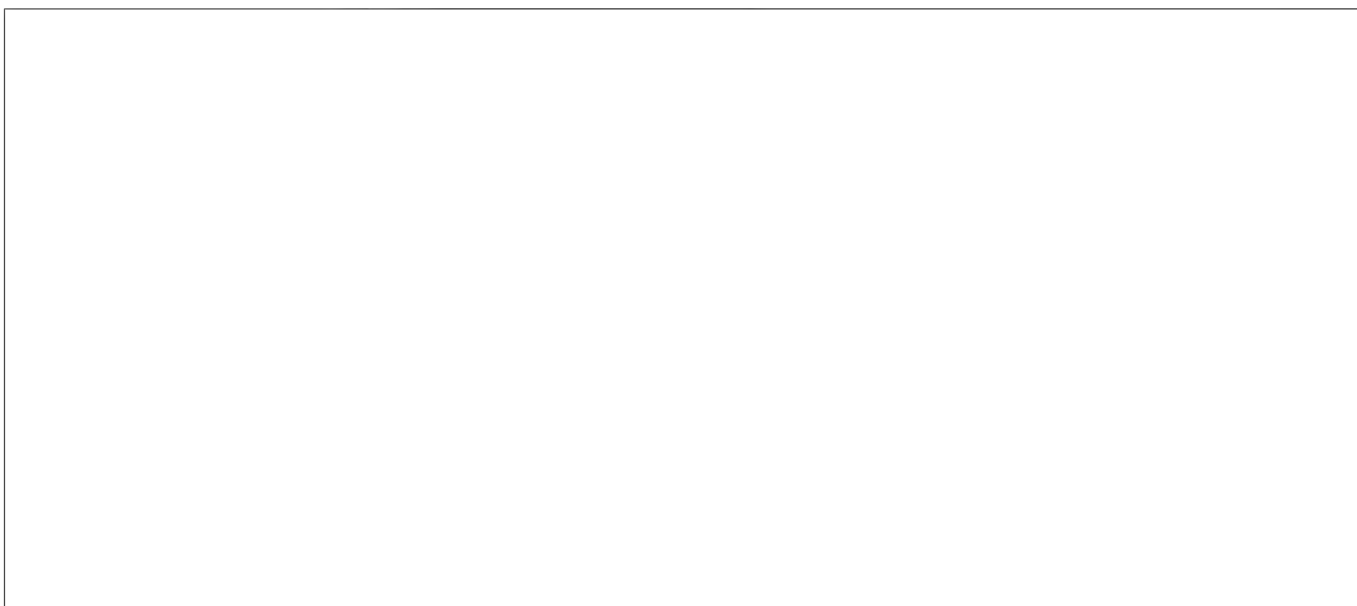
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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT

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Insurgent attacks are a principal reason behind Kabul's energy
and food shortages. [REDACTED]

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PERSPECTIVE

AFGHANISTAN: THE WAR IN THE THREE WESTERN BORDER PROVINCES

There has been generally less fighting in western Afghanistan
than along the Pakistani border; Iranian aid has apparently had
more impact among the Shias in central Afghanistan. [REDACTED]

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This document is prepared weekly by the Office of Near East/South Asia
and the Office of Soviet Analysis. [REDACTED]

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DETERIORATING LIVING CONDITIONS IN KABUL

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The US [] embassies in Kabul report that supplies of electricity, diesel fuel, gasoline, and food are down sharply in comparison with previous winters, even though the electric transmission lines, severed by the resistance on December 27, have been repaired. Many stores and light industries are closed for lack of power; even the wealthier neighborhoods are subject to brown-outs. Gas lines are long. Fewer vegetables are being brought in from the provinces. The Kabulis resentment is aimed at the Soviet/Afghan authorities and not the resistance. []

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Comment: The drop in electricity and fuel supplies results from insurgent attacks against the fuel pipeline and truck convoys from the USSR; also contributing was the widespread purchase of diesel fuel for use as heating oil following the December 27 power blackout. The drop in food supplies probably reflects deteriorating road conditions around Kabul. []

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--The attempted killing of the Soviet Ambassador in Malaysia last Wednesday--undertaken by the Muslim Brotherhood there to punish the Soviets for their involvement in Afghanistan--was a first: heretofore, Soviet Embassies abroad have had to contend only with demonstrations. 

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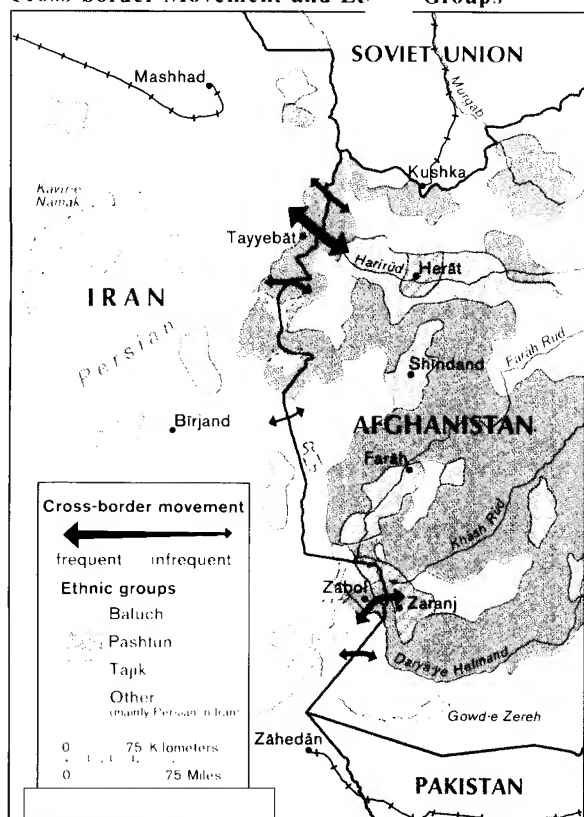
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PERSPECTIVE

AFGHANISTAN: THE WAR IN THE THREE WESTERN BORDER PROVINCES

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There has been generally less fighting in the three western provinces bordering Iran--Herat, Farah, and Nimruz--than along the Pakistani border. The provinces' sparse population, flat and open terrain and distance from arms sources in Pakistan will probably prevent them from ever becoming a major battlefield for the insurgency, with the exception of Herat city.

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Background

Most of the inhabitants of Herat (pop. 769,111) and Farah Provinces (pop. 234,621) are Persian-speaking Tajiks, who can mingle unobtrusively with the Iranians on the other side of the border, or Pushtuns, who tend

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to live in towns. Nimruz's population (103,634) is mainly Baluch, one of the country's most isolated ethnic groups. 

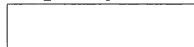
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The provinces' terrain, which is fairly flat and open in the western half, favors the motorized Soviet/Afghan forces, although they are stretched thin. The area's sparse vegetation also limits concealment for the insurgents. The extreme summer heat, especially in Nimruz, cuts down military activity for both sides. 

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Typical terrain near Herat City-- Most traffic between Afghanistan and Iran occurs near Herat, along the only hard-surface, all-weather road that crosses the border. The road links the city with the principal trading centers of eastern Iran. Customs posts are manned on each side of the boundary. Most illegal border traffic crosses the boundary at some distance from the highway. The terrain off the highway is flat and easily trafficable, even for vehicles.



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The Military Situation

There are about 10,000 Soviet troops in the western provinces, most of them at Shindand in Farah Province. Approximately 10,000 Afghan troops are located in the three province capitals, particularly Herat,



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and along the main highway and Iranian border. A key Soviet/Afghan priority has been to keep open the highway, which runs from Kushka in the USSR to Herat City and southward towards Qandahar. Government control becomes particularly tenuous around the middle of Farah Province and continues to deteriorate towards Qandahar. According to the Afghan government's own figures, it controls about half of Herat Province, a third of Farah and a negligible amount of Nimruz. Other observers have given somewhat different figures, but all agree that regime forces control little outside of the three province capitals, Shindand military base in Farah Province, and scattered military garrisons along the main highway and the Iranian border. [REDACTED]

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The Western Provinces and Iran

Although the insurgents in far western Afghanistan are poorly armed because of their long distance from the major sources of arms in Pakistan, Iran has provided training and limited material aid, especially for groups associated with pro-Iranian Afghan clerics. Significantly, however, most of Iran's aid appears to have gone to the Hazara population of central Afghanistan who are entirely Shi'a. [REDACTED]

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Herat City

Perhaps the major priority for the Soviets in the western provinces is control of Herat City which, along with Qandahar, has been the urban area most resistant to government control. Heratis first revolted in March 1979, when they drove Afghan government troops out of the city for three days. Since the invasion, the Soviets have tried to maintain their control by periodically surrounding the city and sending in Afghan troops to conduct house-to-house searches for guerrillas, weapons, and recruits.

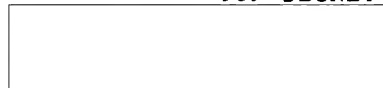
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Our best description of current conditions comes from a western journalist who visited the city in late 1982, although he apparently did not visit the old city where government control is most tenuous. He was taken in a tank from the airport to the city along a road that had Soviet soldiers every four to five kilometers. The buildings along the road had been destroyed. About six kilometers outside the city, the tank was shot at twice; his escort said that this was normal, but that

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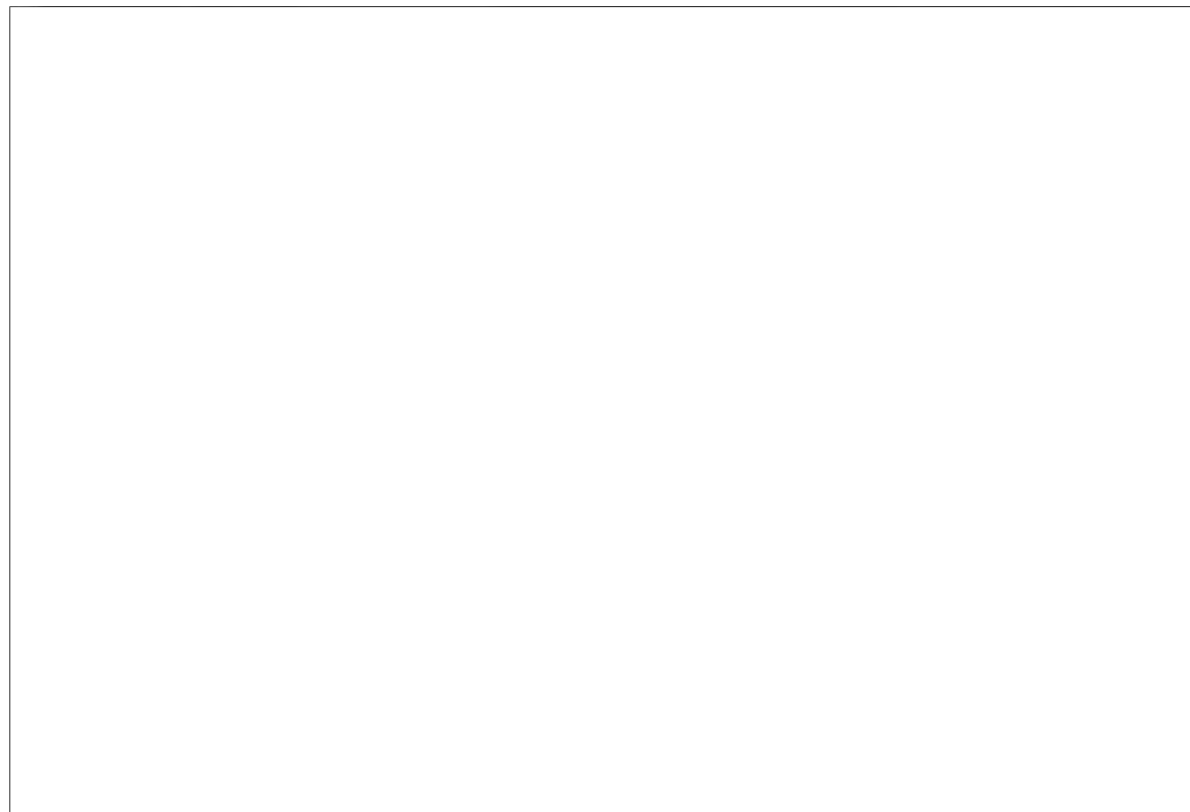
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insurgent rockets were inaccurate beyond the 200 meters that were patrolled along the road. 

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The journalist heard exchanges of gunfire during his two nights there. He did not see any Soviet troops in Herat, though he surmised that they might have been quartered inside the historic minaret complex that he was not allowed to visit. The journalist noted that fruits and vegetables were abundant, but that meat appeared to be scarce. There was no electric power during the day and low voltage at night. Power was supplied by five diesel generators in poor shape. (Electrical power probably was unreliable even before the Communist coup, however.) Although the journalist was allowed to walk the short distance from his hotel to the main mosque, he was surrounded by seven heavily armed men, presumably because he might be mistaken for a Russian and attacked by the insurgents. 

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Conclusions

Because the relatively flat and open terrain of the western half of the three border provinces and their relatively sparse population works in favor of the Soviets, the key to greater insurgent success lies in increased aid from Iran. Although Iran would be in a better position to increase aid once the Iran-Iraq war is over, it may not do so for several reasons. First, and most importantly, Iran may fear provoking the Soviet Union, as its prompt return of the two captured Soviet soldiers in August 1982 suggests. Second, once the war is over, Iran may prefer to channel its revolutionary energies towards the Shia population of the Gulf instead of the largely Sunni population of Afghanistan. In addition, Iran may turn inward either to economic development or to a protracted power struggle following Khomeini's death. []

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On the other hand, there is a broad consensus among Iran's ruling clerics and their lay allies against any moderation of Tehran's attitude toward the Babrak regime and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Tehran will, in our view, continue to try to unite Islamic Afghan insurgent groups, hoping to dominate them and eventually establish an Islamic republic in Kabul. []

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